

A bulwark against China

India must deliver on the promises it has made to Nepal

In the end, KP Sharma Oli kept up the tradition of a new Nepali prime minister making India his first port of call, and used the visit to fashion a resetting of ties with New Delhi. During Mr Oli's talks with PM Narendra Modi, the two sides zeroed in on new areas of cooperation, including a new India-funded railway line to Kathmandu and expediting work on five other railway links, and the development of inland waterways to give Nepal additional access to the sea. All of this will help smooth over the irritants that hit the ties in recent years. For a country that has attached much importance to a "neighbourhood first" policy, India has been late on the draw where crucial neighbours such as Nepal are concerned. Nepal has signed on for China's Belt and Road Initiative and Beijing is drawing up plans for other forms of connectivity. It is in this respect that the visit by Mr Oli, widely perceived as pro-china, assumes significance.

Despite his criticism of New Delhi, Mr Oli has shown there is a role for India in his plans to build a "land-linked Nepal," which benefits from the economic strengths of its two powerful neighbours. He also used the visit to make it clear that policies and strategies of the past will not work. Addressing a civic reception, Mr Oli said obstacles to the movement of goods and people – an apparent reference to the blockade of the Nepal border of 2015-16 – have no place in today's inter-connected world.

Ahead of the visit, Mr Oli also underscored the need to revisit old treaties that have not kept pace with the times. After a decade of transitional politics, including the forging of a new Constitution, Nepal's three-tier elections have created greater stability and Mr Oli has his eyes on speedy economic development to consolidate his grip on power. During this crucial period, India has faltered by putting all its eggs in one or two baskets in Nepal. It is time for India to forge stronger links with all the political forces of Nepal, while setting aside narrow short-term goals. New Delhi must deliver on the promises it has made to Nepal, both old and new, with an eye on the larger goal of matching the inroads made by Beijing.

Source: Hindustan Times